



# Effective Health Care

## Approaches to Weaning Patients with Chronic Pain Off of Opioids Nomination Summary Document

### Results of Topic Selection Process & Next Steps

- The topic, *Approaches to Weaning Patients with Chronic Pain Off of Opioids*, was found to be addressed by a number of systematic reviews, including an AHRQ review titled, *The effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid treatment of chronic pain*, and an in-process systematic review titled, *Systematic review of patient outcomes in dose reduction or discontinuation of chronic opioid therapy*. Given that these reports address or will address this nomination, no further activity will be undertaken on this topic.
  - Chou R, Deyo R, Devine B, et al. *The effectiveness and risks of long-term opioid treatment of chronic pain*. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US); 2014 Sep. (Evidence Reports/Technology Assessments, No. 218.) Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK258809/>
  - Frank J, Becker W, Krebs E, et al. *Systematic review of patient outcomes in dose reduction or discontinuation of chronic opioid therapy*. PROSPERO 2015:CRD42015020347 Available from [http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display\\_record.asp?ID=CRD42015020347](http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display_record.asp?ID=CRD42015020347)

### Topic Description

**Nominator(s):** Individual

**Nomination Summary:** The nominator is interested in the comparative effectiveness of treatments and procedures to wean patients off of opioids used for pain management. The nominator would like to see a comparison of treatment options, including medications, alternative and complementary medicine, counseling and support groups, or no weaning. The nominator would also like to learn when clinicians should wean patients off of opioids, how to wean patients off of opioids, the long-term sequelae of weaning patients off of opioids, as well as how to determine which patients benefit from continuing chronic opioid use and which do not.

#### **Staff-Generated PICO**

**Population(s):** Patients who were prescribed opioids for pain management

**Intervention(s):** Treatments and procedures for weaning patients off of opioids

**Comparator(s):** All other treatment options, such as other medications, alternative and complementary medicine, counseling and support groups, or no weaning

**Outcome(s):** Pain levels; pain control; quality of life; functional status; complications of opioid treatment including addiction and relapse

**Key Questions** 1. What are effective treatments and procedures for weaning patients off of

**from Nominator:**

opioids?

2. What alternatives to opioid use (e.g., counseling, support groups) can be used to most effectively replace opioids in pain management?
3. What populations of patients benefit from chronic opioid use and which should be weaned off?
4. What are the long-term sequelae after patients are weaned off of opioids?

## Considerations

- There is an increasing trend in the number of prescriptions being made for opioids to treat chronic pain. According to the US Food and Drug Administration, approximately 3.8 million patients, annually, receive prescriptions for an extended-release and long-acting (ER/LA) opioid product in the outpatient setting.<sup>1</sup> However, there is limited evidence that shows long-term beneficial effects of opioid use for chronic pain and opioids may be inappropriate and ineffective treatment for many patients.
- The topic was found to be addressed by a 2014 AHRQ evidence report titled, *The Effectiveness and Risks of Long-Term Opioid Treatment of Chronic Pain*. The review examined the following areas of focus relevant to the key questions 1-3 of the topic nomination:
  - Tapering strategies for long-term opioid therapy.  
In patients with chronic pain, the effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy versus placebo or no opioid therapy for long-term (>1 year) outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life
  - In patients with chronic pain, the comparative effectiveness of opioids versus non-opioid therapies (pharmacological or non-pharmacological) on outcomes related to pain, function, and quality of life
  - In patients with chronic pain, the comparative effectiveness of opioids plus non-opioid interventions (pharmacological or non-pharmacological) versus opioids or non-opioid interventions alone on outcomes related to pain, function, quality of life, and doses of opioids used
  - Potential harms associated with long-term opioid use across different patient populations and patient characteristics.
- The topic was found to be addressed by an in-process systematic review titled, *Systematic review of patient outcomes in dose reduction or discontinuation of chronic opioid therapy*. This review is being conducted by the Veterans Affairs Eastern Colorado Healthcare System and is expected to be completed in October 2015. This review includes the following question, which is relevant to key question 4 of the topic nomination:
  - What are the effects of dose reduction or discontinuation of chronic opioid therapy among patients with chronic pain on outcomes related to pain, function, quality of life, withdrawal and substance use?

---

<sup>1</sup> Governale, L. 2010. Outpatient prescription opioid utilization in the U.S., Years 2000 – 2009. U.S. Food and Drug Administration.